

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Combined Approach

In the coming weeks, as you become more comfortable with this relaxation approach, and importantly, your muscle have learned how to release that tension, you can use a 'shortcut' approach, by grouping the muscle areas to tense and release, rather than doing each individually. You would combine them into six larger muscle groups:

- Head, neck, and shoulders
- Hands and arms
- Chest
- Back
- Stomach/bottom
- Legs/feet/toes

Then, when you are comfortable with that, instead of tensing and releasing each of the six major muscle groups individually, you will move to the full body tense and release, and body scan.

Remember to begin with practicing the muscle relaxation with all of the separate muscle groups. Only when you feel ready, move on to the combined muscle approach.

1. First, tense all the muscles in your body, from the top of your head, through your hands, arms, mid body, legs, feet and toes. Hold the tension for 5 seconds and then slowly release the tension from your entire body. As you release the tension, say the word "RELAX" to yourself. Let those muscles slowly release and loosen over about 10 seconds. Repeat this sequence. **Be careful not to tense your muscles too hard. You want to feel tension, not pain!**

2. Second, sit quietly and use the diaphragmatic breathing for 1 or 2 minutes. Then, start at your head and move down to your feet, taking a "mental inventory" of all the muscles in your body. If you find any muscle areas that is still tense, then tighten that area a bit more and fully release that set of muscles only. Repeat if necessary. Remember to use the word "RELAX" every time you release tension.

3. Third, linger a few more moments, noticing and enjoying how your body feels, breathing gently and comfortably.